

NEWS

District News: Volleyball tournament aids recruiting effort

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Rarely do Marines go somewhere where their presence isn't felt. Coaches and student-athletes participating in the East/West Invitational Volleyball Tournament Sept. 11 and 13 couldn't agree more.

The Marine Corps sponsored tournament took place at three Atlanta area high schools — Kennesaw Mountain, Marietta and McEachern — and featured Marines from Recruiting Station Atlanta, recruiters from Recruiting Substation Kennesaw and Depot drill instructors.

The purpose of the Marines sponsorship was to raise awareness among the area's target market. It also addressed the high female attrition rate at recruit training by focusing on quality female prospecting.

"By participating in exclusively female events, we are leveraging an untapped market, as sponsorship and media coverage has traditionally focused on male sports," said Maj. Cason Heard, commanding officer, RS Atlanta.

The young women participating in the event got to see female Marines up close and personal. They were also able to ask questions and dispel some of the myths about the Marine Corps.

"It's cool," said Rachael Brannon, co-caption for Landmark Christian School. "You wouldn't think they would sponsor something like this. I wouldn't have thought there were so many females in the Marine Corps."

What makes this program different from the standard enhanced area-canvassing event is the level of saturation provided by the recruiting station. In contrast to the pull-up challenge, the tournament was branded from top to bottom.

"We have our eagle, globe and anchor on all items, we have our logo on the event shirts, we produce and brand the tournament program, and most importantly we blanket the event with the finest proof sources: female Marines participating in the run-



A player from Landmark Christian School attempts to put the ball down on St. Vincent's during the East/West Invitational Volleyball Tournament sponsored by the Marine Corps.

ning of the tournament," said Heard.

The first day of fierce competition determined which teams were to be in the Gold Pool, the winners' bracket, and the Silver Pool, the losers' bracket.

At Kennesaw Mountain, where the Gold Pool tournament was held, the competition heated up as teams were eliminated one by one until there were only two standing - Landmark Christian School, Atlanta, and St. Vincent's Academy, Savannah.

While the match was intense, there could only be one winner. Landmark Christian School came off the court victorious. After the two teams congratulated each other for a job well done, Landmark players celebrated their hard-earned victory with their coach by cheering and giving each other high-fives.

Both teams were surprised to see Marines at their matches.

"It's great to have the Marines as sponsors," said Katie Thornton, co-captain, Landmark. "Other

sponsors just sit there. [Marines] were involved instead of just handing out stuff. [They] actually watched our games."

"It's a wonderful experience to have the Marines come forward and sponsor the tournament," said Dawn Odom, St. Vincent's head coach. "Normally we have volleyball companies sponsoring, trying to sell stuff to us."

The tournament also drew media attention from The Marietta Daily Journal, of Marietta, Ga., who did a series on the tourna-



Two teams battle it out for the top sport during the East/West Volleyball tournament held in the Atlanta area. The two-day event, sponsored by the Marine Corps, gave high school girls a chance to meet and greet female Marines.

ment in the sports section of the newspaper.

While there was no active recruiting at the tournament, the Marines' presence alone was enough to keep the Corps in the athletes' minds.

"It's great to see women in uniform," said Lauren Mason, co-captain, Landmark. "We appreciated the support and sponsorship."

"I think it's great and I would love to see the Marines out here next year," said Chrissy Barbee, co-captain, St. Vincent's.

The coaches and organizers of the tournament appreciated the help from the Marines in running the event.

"I think [the Marines] did a great job," said Barb Mason, Landmark's head coach. "It was a huge help to the coaches."

The Marine Corps' interest in female athletics by sponsoring female tournaments has resonated well with coaches and athletic directors, said Heard.

Sponsoring the tournament also allowed the Marine Corps to provide exposure for women to a key group of influencers: the coaches.

"Anytime we can link the Marine Corps to high school athletics, and gain positive exposure, we win," said Lt. Col. Laura Ward, recruiting support officer, RS Atlanta.

By participating in this event, the Marines have made the quality female market aware of the career opportunities available to them as Marines and provided an opportunity to meet and greet female Marines who chose the challenges of the Corps as their start in life after high school, said Heard.



Chief Warrant Officer 2 Martin W. Dankanich, range officer for Khe Sanh Range, teaches how to safely handle the 9 mm pistol at Siribachi Range Saturday.

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understanding of what they need to be successful pistol marksmen," added Chief Warrant Officer 2 Martin W. Dankanich, range officer for Khe Sanh range.

Aside from teaching the basics like sight picture/sight alignment and proper grip, the class also taught mental management, said Garza.

"We teach them to come out with a good mental attitude," said Garza. "If they come out here and say, 'I'm not a good shooter,' then they won't hit the target, but if they come out here saying, 'I'm likely to hit center,'

then they'll hit black."

Though the class was educational in nature, for many of the Marines, attending the class was more about having fun than anything else.

"It's a good confidence builder," said Cpl. Jared Hansen, combat photographer for the Combat Visual Information Center. "I think it's cool shooting things. Plus, it's a good way to spend a Saturday morning besides watching Spongebob Squarepants."

"It's a good way of breaking up the monotony of everyday life," added Lance Cpl. Michael J. Molinski, graphic illustrator for CVIC. "I've shot a couple of dif-

ferent types of pistols, but I never had any formal training. So, I hope to use this training when I go home and shoot with my father."

Seasonal shotgun qualification and marksmanship instruction are also available, with range safety officers always on duty.

"I'm confident that anybody who comes out here and does this will leave here a better pistol shooter, and hopefully they'll take the knowledge they've learned and spread that knowledge to someone else," said Garza.

For more information about upcoming recreational firing, contact Dankanich at 228-2793.

should always do everything we can to help each other out."

Gibson said all the money that is given will be used for the distribution of food for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and any money that is left over from the program will be donated to the local food bank on base or out in town, which any active duty Marine can go to if needed.

More than \$4,000 was collected for the Holiday Meal Help Program last year, and Gibson hopes to collect even more money this year.

"I appreciate the emphasis on what we can do to support our fellow Marines during this wonderful time of the year," he added.

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"Particularly the lower-ranking Marines with larger families. It's hard on E-4, E-5 pay when you're trying to support children during Christmas time. This gives them an opportunity to celebrate Christmas in a very good way."

For many families, the extra money they received from the program made a big difference during the holidays when money was tight.

"It was nice having the Corps help out so my family could have a happy holiday season that we probably wouldn't have been able to enjoy otherwise," said one of last year's recipients. "We as Marines